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REGIONAL: New unit targets probation violators

By SARAH GORDON -- Staff Writer



OCEANSIDE ---- *San Diego County probation officers escort a 17-year-old juvenile out of an apartment as they do a warrant sweep in Oceanside on Friday morning (HAYNE PALMOUR IV/Staff photographer)*
 Two people wanted for violating the terms of their probation were arrested Friday morning in Oceanside by a recently formed team of officers devoted to tracking down and arresting such offenders, authorities said. [View a video](#)

The team, called the County Probation Department's Warrant Service Unit, targets people who haven't reported in with their probation officers, said Ken Amerige, the unit's supervisor. With more than 5,000 probation warrants in the system, Amerige said the team focuses on newer cases, as well as juveniles and probationers who may pose a threat to public safety.

Such cases have generally been a low priority for other law enforcement agencies who are busy with new crimes and other felony warrants, Amerige said. But finding AWOL probationers is important work, he added.

"It helps to provide consequences for probationers who aren't meeting their terms and conditions and brings them back before the judge where they can get what they need to get right," he said.

In Friday morning's operation, a 17-year-old Oceanside resident who had been sentenced to probation for battering his girlfriend was arrested, Amerige said.

The teen had not reported to his probation officer or completed required counseling. The Warrant Unit tracked him down to a College Avenue apartment, where he was living with the 19-year-old girlfriend he had abused ---- a direct violation of his probation, Amerige said.

The team also arrested a 28-year-old Oceanside man on probation for making criminal threats to his family. The man, an alleged alcoholic and drug abuser with a string of 15 arrests, had not checked in with probation or followed through on required counseling, Amerige said.

When officers arrested the teen, his pregnant girlfriend cried inside the apartment as he was led away in handcuffs.

"He's my man and I love him," the girl screamed. Amerige said that later, after she had calmed down, he tried to explain what had happened.

"I told her it's better he gets this taken care of now, (rather) than in 5 months when the baby is born," Amerige said.

Amerige said the 17-year-old will go before a judge, who may give him time in Juvenile Hall or renew his probation.

Every month, hundreds of the 24,000 people on probation in San Diego County, including 4,589 in the North County, fail to

check in with probation officers or make a required court appearance, according to the County Probation Department.

In February, 180 warrants were issued to adult probationers, County Probation spokesman Derryl Acosta said. He said juvenile probationers account for another 30 to 40 warrants a month.

In the past, people with probation warrants often slipped through the cracks, said Probation Officer Chris Reynolds, who supervises juvenile offenders.

"The warrant just went in a file cabinet or sat in a warehouse," he said. Now, he said, when one of his charges goes missing, he tells the Warrant Unit, which has five full-time officers to follow up on probation warrants.

In the 17 months since the unit was formed, it has cleared 373 warrants, Amerige said.

Officers in the unit carry out sometimes-lengthy investigations using computers and gumshoeing to track down their targets.

"A lot of this is done by good old-fashioned detective work, knocking on doors of neighbors, asking for information," Amerige said.

The Probation Department has a dual role of rehabilitating criminals and protecting public safety; clearing warrants serves both goals, Amerige said.

He pointed to an arrest last year of a woman who had been given probation for identity theft. When the warrant team tracked her down, after looking for her for several months, they found "tons of stolen credentials," at her house, Amerige said.

She was arrested on nine felony counts of identity theft, he added.

Contact staff writer Sarah Gordon at (760) 901-4076 or sgordon@nctimes.com.